

24. December 2023

4th Sunday of Advent
The Obedience of Faith

Rom 16:25-27

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith- to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

In today's reading, as we approach the great feast of Christmas, we are told of the glory of God, for every human work must have as its goal the glorification of its Lord. And it is precisely the revelation of the mystery of God, revealed in the Gospel, that serves the glory of God.

If we meditate on the brief words of the reading, one phrase stands out: all nations are to be brought to the obedience of faith. This is the mission which the Lord gave to his disciples and which, through them, has been transmitted to the whole Church.

This formulation of Saint Paul suggests that the proclamation of the faith is not a simple offer that people can accept or reject without further consequences. Moreover, these words of the Apostle show that the evangeliser has a great duty, since the Lord's mission is unconditional, in keeping with the greatness of its message and its saving power. Let us recall the other words of Saint Paul when he says that evangelisation is a "duty incumbent upon him" (cf. 1 Cor 9:16).

Pagans, then, must be brought to the obedience of faith. And by saying that it "must" be done in this way, he shows that there is an inner commitment in man, both to proclaim the faith and to receive it.

This does not mean that any kind of physical or psychological coercion should be used in the proclamation of the faith. On the contrary, the Gospel must be presented in a convincing and attractive way. But we must not forget that each person has an inner obligation to accept the faith that is proclaimed.

This is the demand that comes from the truth, because man was created for the truth. If man does not act in accordance with it, even though he knows it, he would be abusing his freedom and would not be free from guilt.

The true freedom of a person is to act in accordance with the known truth and to accept it willingly. From this perspective, we see once again the seriousness of the great good that has been entrusted to us.

In a world that relativises everything and rejects any absolute truth, the Gospel must be proclaimed with authority and the Church must show herself to be a firm rock. As the Lord said: *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away"* (Mt 24:35). The awareness that the hearer of the Gospel has an inner duty to be open to the truth, and that the evangeliser has a sacred obligation to proclaim the Good News, should not lead us to inner tension. It should, however, increase our vigilance so that we do not miss the opportunities the Lord gives us to evangelise. We can invoke the Holy Spirit and ask Him to give us this vigilance and to help us listen to and obey His voice.

In addition, we are always called to pray for the conversion of others, remembering that in this way we can participate in the work of salvation. This is a great honour, but also a great responsibility!

With these thoughts in mind, we can welcome Christmas as an invitation to immerse ourselves in the love of the Lord, to let ourselves be overcome by the sweetness of the Child, and to serve this God who became man for us with all our heart.